United Nations S/PV.7981

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7981st meeting
Wednesday, 21 June 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Barro
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin-Nyoni
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

The Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/529, which contains the text of a draft resolution, submitted by France.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): On 12 March, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo went missing. Their bodies were found a few days later. It was clear that they had been murdered. The Security Council condemned their deaths in the strongest of terms and called for an in-depth investigation to find the perpetrators of the crime and bring them to justice. Today I reiterate that condemnation in the strongest of terms, as well as that call. To that end, France also advocates the establishment of a special board of inquiry.

Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán carried out work that was extremely important to the Security Council and were very professional in their duties. The experts on United Nations sanctions committees are extremely important to the Council and are the key to the sanctions regimes. I would like thank them again for their service to the Security Council. Justice must be served; we owe it to them and to their families.

They died while conducting an investigation on the tragic situation in the Kasais. We have received very worrisome reports on attacks on civilians and on many gross human rights violations, including the mutilation and murder of children. In recent months, the Council has condemned the violence in the region and expressed its deep concern about such human rights violations. It has underscored the importance and the urgency of carrying out diligent and transparent investigations on violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law so as to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. That is required now more than ever.

The tragic events have seriously disrupted the work of the Group of Experts. That is why France proposed the adoption of a draft resolution to allow the Group of Experts to resume their work as soon as possible and in calmer conditions. It is in essence a technical renewal but, given the circumstances, France has proposed the following changes. We hope that all the members of the Council will agree with this approach.

Through the draft resolution contained in document S/2017/529, the Council would reiterate its condemnation of the murders of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán and recall the need for a thorough and swift investigation to determine those responsible and bring them to justice. It would call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cooperate with the investigations that might be conducted by the United Nations, Sweden or the United States in an effort to shed light on the events.

The draft resolution would also introduce a new criterion for imposing sanctions, which would target any individual who attacks a member of the Group of Experts or who is involved in such an act. The Council would also reiterate its condemnation of the violence in Kasais and its call for transparent investigations to be urgently undertaken to identify the perpetrators of human rights violations in that region.

Finally, given the constraints faced by the experts, this draft resolution would provide the Group of Experts with an additional two months in which to complete its final report. It also envisages that the Council would review the sanctions regime and make any necessary amendments once the report has been completed.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2360 (2017).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): Resolution 2360 (2017), which we have just adopted, reaffirms the Council's commitment to continue the work started by Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo who tragically lost their lives in March while on mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By renewing the Group of Experts' mandate, the resolution sends a clear message that the Council will continue to advance Michael and Zaida's work to advance peace and address human rights violations and abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The resolution also underscores the Council's commitment to take action against those who seek to harm United Nations personnel, including the Group of Experts.

To the families of Michael and Zaida, the members of the Groups of Experts, the personnel of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and Special Representative Sidikou, let me say that our expressions of support and praise are just not enough. We know that they deserve our commitment to finding out the truth and holding those who target United Nations personnel accountable. Today we took a small, but important, step to do that.

Just as important, the resolution is for the Congolese, who have witnessed far too much violence, corruption and far too many human rights abuses. The gruesome reports coming out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, specifically from the Kasais, should prompt us into action not only in the Security Council, but also in the Human Rights Council. Just yesterday, we read reports that over 3,000 people had been killed in the Kasais region in the past eight months.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo military has not just engaged in violence against civilians, it has actually filmed summary executions. We have heard numerous reports of villages being burned and looted, rape used as a weapon of war, and children being targeted and executed in their homes. Approximately 20,000 people have fled the Kasais since early April, and yet the Democratic Republic of the Congo has rejected offers for international support to investigate the violence. Zaida and Michael lost their lives seeking the truth in the Kasais. We cannot let that search end, particularly as the reports coming out of the region grow increasingly disturbing and the refugee flows continue unabated.

There will be no peace or security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo without elections and a democratic transition of power. All parties, both the opposition and the Government, must remain committed to the 31 December agreement and take action to expedite the implementation of the agreement, including much needed confidence-building measures.

The Council and the United States Government stand ready to hold accountable those that foment violence, undermine peace and increase instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni (Sweden): Sweden welcomes the renewal of the sanctions regime and the extended mandate for the Group of Experts for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and wishes to thank the delegation of France for its work on resolution 2360 (2017). It is imperative that the Group of Experts can continue its important work, including by completing its final report, and that the Council subsequently follow up on its recommendations.

It is a grave concern that the humanitarian and security situation continues to deteriorate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with harsh implications for its population. Horrific violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including sexual violence and other rampant abuses, as well as increased recruitment and the use of child soldiers, reinforces the vicious cycle of violence. It is important that the international community continues to monitor and address the situation. The sanctions regime plays an important part in that endeavour.

As members of the Group of Experts, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp were vital to this effort. We again strongly condemn their murder. It is intolerable that those tasked by the Council with investigating grave abuses and violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law, for the sake of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are brutally killed. The safety of United Nations personnel must be ensured. In the light of the killings, Sweden put forward and actively supported the inclusion of attacks

against members of the Group of Experts as an explicit designation criterion.

In the case of the murders of Catalán and Sharp, our continued priority is to determine the facts and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. The Democratic Republic of the Congo must swiftly and fully investigate the killing of the two members of the Group of Experts and bring all perpetrators to justice. Full cooperation by the Democratic Republic of the Congo with United Nations inquiries, as well as our own and the United States criminal investigations is essential, as highlighted by today's resolution.

No stone should be left unturned in our efforts to deliver justice for those who lost their lives in the service of the United Nations. Sweden, in cooperation with the Secretary-General and partners concerned, will continue to look into concrete proposals on how the United Nations system, including the Council, can further support the ongoing national investigations, in order to establish the truth and bring the perpetrators to justice. One such option would be a special investigation mandated by the Secretary-General.

We must also draw lessons from possible failures in the system so that what happened to the experts cannot happen again. Sweden supported the prompt establishment by the United Nations of a so-called Board of Inquiry. We look forward to the report to be presented by the Board of Inquiry next month. The Council should follow up on its recommendations, including when the resolution is discussed again in the fall.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2360 (2017), which extends the sanctions regime in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That regime is a hugely important tool for the Council, one that we must use to hold to account those who commit human rights abuses and violations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sadly, that now includes those who commit such abuses against United Nations personnel, following the horrific murders of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán. We reiterate our condolences to the families of Michael and Zaida and to the Governments of the United States, Sweden and Chile. It is imperative that there be a full and independent investigation into their deaths.

More broadly, the United Kingdom is extremely concerned about the situation in the Kasais. High Commissioner Prince Zeid Al-Hussein's statement yesterday put into stark relief the horror of the situation, which has led over 1.3 million people to flee. That scale of violence and level of brutality — destruction of villages, mutilation and murder, including of children and pregnant women — cannot be allowed to continue. We call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to protect its people, to act in accordance with human rights principles and to bring perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses to justice.

The United Kingdom also expresses its full support for Prince Zeid Al-Hussein's call for an independent international investigation into the situation in the Kasais region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We fully support the current efforts in Geneva to mandate such an independent investigation through the Human Rights Council. We call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cooperate fully with any international investigation and to ensure that any domestic investigation is conducted credibly and transparently and that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

It is clear that the impact of the situation is being felt beyond the Kasais and, indeed, beyond the Democratic Republic of the Congo. More than 30,000 refugees have been registered in Angola. It is essential that we in the Security Council keep a very close eye on the situation and are prepared to act.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt welcomes today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2360 (2017), based on our conviction that the sanctions regime contributes to consolidating peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to support the efforts to reduce the threats posed by armed groups and other entities that are threatening civilians, perpetrating grave crimes, prolonging violence and causing instability.

In that regard, I would like to mention a specific situation surrounding the adoption of that resolution, in the light of the killing of the two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp. We condemn that act in the strongest terms, as does the resolution. The Council stands with the families of the victims and the countries concerned. The Government in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must carry out a swift and complete investigation to uncover the truth and hold those perpetrators accountable. We call on them to cooperate with the United Nations

and the two countries concerned — the United States and Sweden — in a way that is in line with relevant legislation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In the light of the consultations that took place within the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which reflected our consensus in supporting the Group of Experts through the extreme circumstances they are facing, the resolution provides an additional two months to the Group of Experts so that it can carry out its work pursuant to the relevant resolution, resolution 2293 (2016), and submit its final report to the Security Council.

Based on that, the current resolution provides some addition elements that cover a number of matters and the most urgent developments, with some technical updates to the remaining paragraphs of the resolution so that the final report that the Group of Experts will submit will be the basis for new substantive consultations between the members of the Council to fully review the sanctions measures. On that basis, we can adopt a new resolution before the end of October 2017.

Egypt reaffirms the importance of the sanctions regime — an important tool for enhancing security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which in turn is considered to be the cornerstone for peace and security in the Great Lakes region. Based on our chairmanship of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), we seek to enhance the role of the Committee, especially in the light of the security challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and given their grave humanitarian repercussions.

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): At the outset I should like, on behalf of my Government, to once again convey our condolences to the families of the two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán. We also extend our sympathy and solidarity to Chile, Sweden and the United States.

We commend the unanimous adoption of resolution 2360 (2017). It sends a strong message about the unity of the Security Council on this important topic. I should like to thank the French delegation for its efforts in drafting the text, which conveys the Council's energetic and explicit condemnation over the murder of the two Experts.

At the same time, the resolution enables us to condemn the violence in Kasais. Italy is extremely concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in those provinces, about human rights violations and the shrinking of the democratic space in the country. We are therefore convinced of the need to continue to implement the New Year agreement of 31 December 2016, which is critical to supporting the legitimacy of the transitional institutions.

Given the country's situation, which remains very difficult, Italy endeavours to work alongside the members of the Council and assisting the Democratic Republic of the Congo to achieve stabilization.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council for thie month of June and to express my delegation's satisfaction at the great skill and professionalism with which you have steered the work of the Council this month. I would also like to thank you for having given me this opportunity to take the floor before the Council during this meeting, dedicated to the adoption of resolution 2360 (2017), which renews the sanctions regime for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I should also like to express once again to the Council the gratitude of the Congolese Government and people for the efforts of the United Nations with a view to safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country, and to provide for and guarantee its peace and stability.

My delegation takes note of the Council's adoption of the resolution that renews the mandate of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo until 1 August 2018.cMy delegation takes this opportunity to thank the Group of Experts, which continues to dedicate itself to the cause of the country, and extends its encouragement and sympathy in honouring the memory of two of their colleagues who tragically lost their lives in our country. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights said yesterday at the thirty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Government of my country is determined to ensuring that light be shed on these heinous murders and to ensuring that the perpetrators be held to account.

With respect to resolution 2360 (2017) just adopted, I would like to revisit some aspects that, in my delegation's opinion, deserve some comment.

Generally speaking, my delegation believes that, insofar as the Group of Experts is due to present its report in two months, the resolution could have been limited to extending the Group's mandate to two months in order to allow it to finalize its report. In our view, the report could have served in principle as a basis for the drafting of the resolution. In so doing we could have avoided the adoption of a plethora of resolutions that, at first blush, are unwarranted in the present case. Council members will agree that adopting a resolution in March, a second one in June and a third in August or September is not an approach that would facilitate their implementation.

Furthermore, we believe that political issues, such those related to the 31 December 2016 political agreement and to the elections, which are already duly reflected in the resolution adopted in March (resolution 2348 (2017)), need not have been referred to in a resolution of the Sanctions Committee. My delegation has already lamented this situation, which was the subject of its note verbale of 20 June 2016, which was conveyed to various member States of the Council at the time. However, important security issues that require an urgent response, such as the South Sudanese combatants, have been cast aside.

Turning to the sanctions regime, my delegation believes that resolution 2360 (2017) spells out no measure that could stabilize the situation with regard to the plundering of natural resources being exported from the Democratic Republic of the Congo through bordering countries. The same holds true for weapons and munitions trafficking. Council members will agree with us that armed groups do not sell the products of their looting to so-called little people, that is, people without resources. We believe that, in order to put an end to this situation, sanctions must be imposed against multinational companies. They are well known and supply these criminals with weapons. Sanctions should also target transit and host countries of transit for these blood minerals.

In view of the fact that resolution 2360 (2017) refers to the situation in the Kasais region, my delegation deems it wise to inform the Council that the Government has undertaken joint investigations to shed light on the events that took place in the there. Contrary to what I have heard here, the Government of my country has never refused to cooperate with investigations relating to events in the Kasais. It is working jointly with the United Nations through the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office. In that regard, one should note the adoption last month of a road map and the establishment of a task force in which MONUSCO and the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office are members. The Government also hopes to receive technical and logistical assistance from the two United Nations agencies for the joint investigations. Furthermore, it expects from them frank collaboration devoid of any political interference.

With specific reference to mass graves, reports of their existence were made here at Headquarters, mainly by MONUSCO. We deplore the contrast between the speed with which MONUSCO spreads rumours and the slow pace of informing the international community when those rumours turn out to be groundless. My delegation would flag as proof the recent cases of reported mass graves that were dismissed by our Human Rights Minister in Geneva. It is confounding to note that MONUSCO up until now has failed to announce the results of the joint MONUSCO and military justice representatives' visits on the ground.

Indeed, in a number of these alleged mass graves, what these joint missions found was something other than what was expected, namely, a 12-calibre hunting weapon in one, a motorcycle in another, two decapitated bodies in a third and a body in a fourth. And today it is the Congolese military judiciary that has begun to insist that MONUSCO show the other mass graves for them to pursue their joint work.

With respect to the judicial proceedings on the death of the two experts, as we mentioned before, an investigation was initiated by the Congolese military judiciary, with MONUSCO and the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office both lending support. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation has also become involved at the request of the Government of the United States of America. The Government of my country is open and willing to follow suit if the Swedish Government issues a request to that end.

Since 5 June 2017, the trial of these murders has been under way in Kananga, in Central Kasai. MONUSCO and the United Nations Joint Human

Rights Office have been attending every day, as have all other non-governmental organizations that wish to do so. To date, nine suspects, four of whom are in the grim video showing the savage murder of the two experts, have been arrested and are currently being tried. The military judiciary in my country is counting on the assistance of MONUSCO, which states that it has information about areas where fugitives are hiding in order to help it arrest and try these criminals.

I would be remiss if I were to conclude without once again reassuring the Council of my country's determination to carry out these investigations to the very end, in a transparent way, so as to punish, as we mentioned, the guilty parties.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7982

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	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
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Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 2 March to 1 June 2017) (S/2017/505)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 2 March to 1 June 2017) (S/2017/505)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of South Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Haysom is participating in today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/505, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan covering the period from 2 March to 1 June 2017.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the Secretary-General's 90-day report (S/2017/505) on the situation in South Sudan.

I should state at the outset that the people of South Sudan remain desperate for peace. More than half of the country requires food aid, despite its tremendous potential for food production. One third of the population is displaced. Half of those displaced are refugees, who have been arriving in Uganda at a rate of 50,000 for each month of this year. Others have fled to the Sudan in record numbers, and Kenya and Ethiopia are also hosting thousands of South Sudanese.

We must not lose sight of the fact that this tragedy is man-made. It is neither a meteorological phenomenon nor the result of traditional enmities between local communities. It is the result of decisions by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Government, the SPLA in Opposition and various other entities to pursue and sustain armed conflict in order to achieve political goals. Extreme violence continues to create ever deeper divisions among the people of South Sudan and make it even more difficult for us to put the country back on a path to peace and development. Hostilities have persisted well after the ceasefire commitment made by President Salva Kiir and continue to unfold in various parts of the country. In the North, the SPLA has dislodged Opposition forces from their strongholds on the west bank of the Nile River. In the East, it has taken towns in northern Greater Jonglei. In the west, clashes between Government and Opposition forces around Wau have forced 22,000 people to take refuge with the Mission. And fighting in the South has left towns in the Equatorias with as little as 10 per cent of their previous populations.

In the midst of those hostilities, displacements and human rights abuses, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has been doing its utmost to protect civilians. Our peacekeepers persevere in getting through checkpoints to reach vulnerable populations even when their patrols are threatened and sometimes shot at. Their proactive approach directly supports the South Sudanese people, giving them confidence that we are there to protect them, enabling us to report human rights abuses, and helping us to support our humanitarian partners in ensuring that assistance goes to those who need it most.

In the meantime, we continue to press forward with the deployment of the Regional Protection Force (RPF). The advance parties of the RPF vanguard units have begun arriving, including those of the engineering and high-readiness companies. The main bodies of both contingents are on track to arrive by late July. Subject to cargo readiness, security clearances and final tax exemptions from the Government, the expected time for the Ethiopian advance infantry company to begin to deploy is July at the earliest. The commencement of the Kenyan troops' deployment remains subject to completion of the ongoing repatriation of Kenya's contingent-owned equipment from Wau and its subsequent refurbishment to meet the needs of its RPF contribution.

Concerning the Government's allocation of the required second plot of land for the northern base site of the RPF, the Government informed UNMISS,

in a letter dated 11 April, that it had allocated a site approximately 12 kilometres north of central Juba. On 19 April, an UNMISS integrated team, accompanied by community leaders and country and local Government representatives, visited the site to assess its suitability. The Mission has a number of reservations about the operational suitability and accessibility of the site, but we continue to explore options for its use in conjunction with existing bases at Tomping and United Nations House, in order to ensure that the land issue does not further delay the RPF's deployment, since that is still an important enabler for the political process in South Sudan.

While we welcome the commitments made by President Salva Kiir at the swearing-in of the National Dialogue Steering Committee, we note with concern that the unilateral ceasefire he announced has so far not materialized. With regard to his pledge to release political prisoners, I should point out to the Council that, while one United Nations staff member was recently released, two others have been held for two years without being charged and another has recently been detained in Rumbek. We must judge the President's commitments by his actions. And, critically, the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism should finally be granted full freedom of movement to monitor and verify ceasefire violations. UNMISS and the Monitoring Mechanism have been dealing with far too many obstructions of their movements, making their work extremely challenging and in some cases impossible.

We are encouraged by the communiqué of 13 June from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which included a number of concrete steps aimed at resuscitating the South Sudan political process. The proposed high-level revitalization forum to be convened by the IGAD Council of Ministers and the meeting of the chiefs of defence staff of the RPF are welcome initiatives that we hope to see happen soon. Allow me to register our strong support for IGAD and regional partners as they move forward to actualize the various initiatives spelled out in the communiqué. The Mission and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are ready to provide whatever support may be required to that end.

I believe it important to take this opportunity to emphasize our views on recent references to the prospect of elections in South Sudan. Under the 2015 peace agreement, elections are to be held towards the end of the transitional period, which was originally estimated to be in 2018. We must be clear that if the current situation of armed conflict, political paralysis, massive displacement, humanitarian and protection needs, and ongoing human rights abuses were to persist, then credible, free and fair elections will not be possible in South Sudan. Elections are the ultimate democratic process and would require pervasive stability and an environment in which people can freely express their political opinions.They would also require that the transitional institutions established by the peace agreement be genuinely inclusive of all groups and political persuasions, as envisaged in the agreement.

Operative paragraph 34 of resolution 2327 (2016) requested that the Secretary-General provide the Council with a review of the progress made by the parties in ceasing hostilities, returning to the path of dialogue and achieving inclusiveness within the Government, as well as recommend any relevant adjustments to the UNMISS mandate. In the light of the lack of real progress in these key areas and the continuation of the political and security crisis that plagues South Sudan, we cannot recommend any adjustments to the Mission's current mandate. The persistence of significant military operations on the ground, the lack of dialogue between the parties and the absence of authentic inclusivity within the governmental structures in South Sudan mean, unfortunately, that UNMISS's mandate, as currently structured under resolution 2327 (2016), remains relevant and suited to purpose; this includes the role of the Regional Protection Force in enhancing security and the protection of civilians in the capital. Should a genuine cessation of hostilities take hold, buttressed by the full implementation of the peace agreement, revisiting the UNMISS mandate and the tasks of the Regional Protection Force would be warranted.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that the Secretariat is continuing to make every effort to take forward the core tasks of its mandate, including with respect to expediting the deployment of the RPF. Meanwhile, although the President declared a unilateral ceasefire and the launch of the national dialogue on 22 May, it remains to be seen whether these developments will yield any tangible improvement in the security or humanitarian situation on the ground. We cannot lose sight of the fact that neither the RPF nor UNMISS is a panacea for this crisis. Only a truly inclusive political process and the genuine political will of the

key protagonists to end the conflict and implement the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan will bring peace to this country.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Haysom.

Mr. Haysom: I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on South Sudan. My remarks build on the briefing provided by Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and cover developments specific to the resumption of a political process in South Sudan.

My starting point is the concluding observation of Under-Secretary-General Lacroix: that only a truly inclusive political process and the political will to implement the peace agreement will bring peace to war-torn South Sudan.

It is important to define what is meant by an inclusive political process in South Sudan. Simply put, a genuine and inclusive political process at the least must involve the combatants and those political leaders with whom combatants and communities are aligned, as well as the signatories to the 2015 peace agreement. At the moment, no clear, inclusive political process is in sight. There is still the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-sponsored peace agreement signed in 2015, to which the United Nations is a witness. Even though its current status is contested, it remains the only valid document signed by the major stakeholders. Though originally agreed with reservations by the Government, there is now broad understanding that the text is mostly and widely supported and should be adjusted only to the extent necessary to reflect new realities, including in respect of the inclusivity requirement.

The expulsion of Riek Machar — a key signatory — from South Sudan and his procedurally contested replacement by General Taban Deng has added a particular difficulty to establishing such a process: the demand for an inclusive process contradicts the narrative that First Vice-President Deng represents and will incorporate all opposition groups into the Government construct. The Government has argued that Mr. Deng's participation in the Government meets the inclusivity requirement set out in the peace agreement, and, following this logic, the Government has been required to pacify the remaining opposition-held areas and has consistently proposed alternatives to an inclusive political process.

However, we sense that this opposition may be softening. In the meantime, the pacification strategy has allowed the opposition to claim that they are in favour of peace, while justifying their military posture as protecting themselves against a Government offensive. Since July the conflict has spread throughout the country, and new actors, armed and unarmed, have emerged. All only pay lip service to the proposition that there can be no military solution to this conflict.

As noted by Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, the mere introduction of the Regional Protection Force cannot substitute for a political solution, although it would surely contribute to an enabling environment for a peace process.

Questions have arisen as to whether the national dialogue could substitute for an inclusive political process. A genuinely inclusive and credible national dialogue would, no doubt, be an important nation-building exercise in and of itself. In South Sudan, it would need to be anchored in a peace process and not be offered as a substitute for such a process. It would have to be preceded by a political process that creates the security and political environment necessary for an inclusive and credible dialogue.

The demand for the opposition to lay down its weapons in order to participate in the national dialogue is interpreted as a call to surrender, without any assurance that the underlying grievances will be addressed. Nonetheless, it is most encouraging that the steering committee of the national dialogue only yesterday announced its intention to consult opposition groups outside the country, including Mr. Riek Machar.

It seems that other political alternatives have been offered, such as trusteeship, early elections and a return to the status quo ante, that are deemed politically unfeasible. This realization, coupled with the downward trajectory of South Sudan, has now led to an increasingly broad understanding among South Sudanese and regional and international players that there is no way around an inclusive political process.

To that end, and following the 25 January meeting of the Secretary-General, the African Union Chairperson and the IGAD Chair, President Alpha Oumar Konare engaged the South Sudanese Government and regional players in order to revive the political process, obtain

a cessation of hostilities and create an environment conducive to inclusive dialogue.

His engagements — which, apparently, are due, after a three-month hiatus, to recommence in earnest shortly — were followed at the time by a visit of the Chair of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, to South Sudan soon after taking office. These efforts on their own have so far not led to concrete steps forward on a political process.

The Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, President Festus Mogae, has spoken of the limits to the implementation of the peace agreement in the face of pervasive conflict and the non-participation of active combatants and has called for a unified effort to secure those conditions. I can report that arrangements are now being made for both Presidents Konaré and Mogae, and my office to work together on a joint action plan, which will in turn be promoted jointly to regional leaders in the coming weeks.

Faced with a deteriorating situation in South Sudan and increasing calls from the international community for engagement, South Sudan's neighbours have also been exploring ways and means to start a process that could bring the conflict to an end. One of those initiatives, led by President Museveni of Uganda, is focused on the reunification of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Noting that the earlier decision to exclude the SPLM in Opposition, led by Riek Machar, from this exercise had drawn criticism from some participants, Uganda has now belatedly reached out to Mr. Machar, who declined to participate due to his present circumstances and the short notice of the invitation. It is to be recalled that the Ugandan initiative was faulted earlier by the former detainees group for prioritizing party unification over bringing the war to an end.

We understand that there have also been discussions between President Kenyatta and the opposition parties on the facilitation of a meeting of all the opposition groups in Kenya. Recalling the reported abduction of opposition figures in Kenya, some groups have expressed anxiety about the meeting venue. Yet they seem to see the value of establishing a joint platform as a necessary step for full political engagement with the Government.

The most recent initiative emanates from the extraordinary summit of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) held on 12 June. Reiterating that the full implementation of the peace agreement remained the only viable way to bring about peace, IGAD had decided to convene a high-level revitalization forum of the parties to the 2015 agreement, including what it termed "estranged groups". The forum will address concrete measures to restore the permanent ceasefire, advance the full implementation of the peace agreement, and to develop a "revised and realistic timeline" for democratic elections at the end of the transition period. To that effect, the summit mandated the IGAD Council of Ministers to urgently convene and facilitate such a forum in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of IGAD-African Union (AU)-United Nations collaboration.

Those proposals, as well as the appointment of an IGAD Special Envoy, were positive outcomes of the summit. One concern, however, remains, and that is the lack of clear timelines for the implementation of the proposals put forward in the IGAD communiqué.

There seems to be a common understanding now that a credible political process in South Sudan is one in which, inter alia, both President Kiir's Government and the SPLM in Opposition that is, the Riek Machar faction, are represented, although not necessarily by having the principal protagonists attend themselves. In addition, it would require the attendance of the new players that have come to the fore, at least for the purposes of negotiating a ceasefire and an adjustment to the peace agreement.

The opposition groups began meeting in April and have started issuing joint statements regarding developments in the country. They are reported to have met with the Government officials of neighbouring States to seek their understanding and support. It remains to be seen whether the groups will overcome the differences between them, especially on the issue of the leadership of the Opposition. Still, the discussions that took place in the Oslo forum last week among the opposition groups, which I chaired, revealed more common ground among them, and even between the Opposition and the Government, than had been the impression before.

I believe the demands for a resumption of an inclusive political process are greater today than they were a month ago, or three months ago; but much work remains to be done for a credible political process to be established. The international community should, in support of those efforts, deliver a clear message

that it supports an inclusive process that includes all significant armed groups and the political parties that are, to one degree of another, influential in bringing the ongoing fighting to a halt. Initiatives, including regional initiatives that promote dialogue within the opposition and between the opposition and the Government should be supported. Collaboration between IGAD, the AU and the United Nations should further be promoted.

Finally, to reinforce the common message, credible national elections can be held only to conclude a transition period underpinned by political inclusion and stability — not in circumstances of insecurity and widespread displacement. My office will continue to engage all South Sudanese stakeholders and work closely with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the members of the international community, particularly IGAD and the AU, in pursuit of those objectives.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Haysom for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our gratitude for the briefings that we have just heard from the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, Mr. Nicholas Haysom. We would like to thank them for their very comprehensive overview of recent events in South Sudan.

Uruguay would like to reiterate its deep-rooted concern and alarm in light of the political, security, economic and humanitarian crisis currently ravaging South Sudan. A month ago (see S/PV.7950), my delegation recognized the launch of the national dialogue and the declaration of the cessation of hostilities by President Salva Kiir. At the time, we made it clear that there was a need to follow up on both of those initiatives. Today, we regret to note that there has been little — practically zero — progress due to the lack political will of the parties to the conflict, to the great despair of the population. Despite the unilateral declaration of the cessation of hostilities, armed clashes have continued in the country over the past few months.

Furthermore, the national dialogue process launched by the Government has been rejected in its current format by various members of the opposition. In that connection, it is necessary that the stakeholders continue to make efforts to ensure that the existing dialogue process is more inclusive and representative of all the voices of South Sudan. Only an inclusive dialogue will achieve the legitimacy necessary to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. It will be unfeasible, moreover, to launch a credible dialogue process in a climate of war and fear. The international community, including the United Nations, the African Union and regional and subregional bodies, must make a coordinated contribution to the dialogue process in South Sudan, in accordance with the relevant conditions to be legitimate.

We support the observations set out in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/505) in terms of the current structure and mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which remain relevant and appropriate to the realities on the ground. On that particular point, Uruguay believes that UNMISS should continue to have as its highest priority the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights and the submission of reports on human rights abuses and violations. In that regard, we call upon the Government of South Sudan to fully cooperate with the implementation of resolution 2327 (2016), including with regard to the deployment of the Regional Protection Force. Any restrictions on the free functioning of UNMISS should be lifted in full compliance with the status of forces agreement. We would like to recall that neither UNMISS nor the Regional Protection Force are a panacea for resolving the crisis. Only a genuine, inclusive political process, complemented by the political will of the parties, will bring peace to South Sudan.

I wish to conclude by paying tribute to the courage and dedication of the staff of UNMISS and to the humanitarian workers who continue to protect and to provide assistance to millions of victims of humanitarian disasters, and who do so in a very dangerous operational environment.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for bringing the crisis in South Sudan to the attention of the Security Council, and I express my appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Lacroix, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, Mr. Haysom, for their comprehensive and insightful briefings.

We fully endorse the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2017/7969) and his monthly update on the deployment of the Regional Protection Force. My delegation would like to make the following observations and recommendations.

First, despite efforts made by the Transitional Government and Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, in general slight tangible progress has been made in the peace process. Only inclusive and transparent dialogue, as well as the ful'-fledged implementation of the Agreement on the Resc iution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan can result in genuine reconciliation.

In that regard, we need to fully support the concerted efforts of the United Nations, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to achieve our objectives in South Sudan. At the same time, we need to ensure that the national dialogue launched by President Salva Kiir one month ago be truly inclusive and transparent. We therefore welcomed the decision made at the thirty-first IGAD Extraordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State to convene a revitalization forum. It is noteworthy that that platform will include all parties so as to discuss the implementation of the peace agreement and prepare for the upcoming democratic elections. The foundations will therefore be laid to help build State institutions.

Secondly, Kazakhstan commends the efforts of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those areas in need. We note the report's mention that UNMISS continues to encounter bureaucratic obstacles and restrictions in connection with its operations and freedom of movement in implementing its mandate. My delegation expresses its support for the three-tiered approach to the protection of civilians, especially with regard to women and children. We endorse the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Mission remain structured under resolution 2327 (2016).

Thirdly, severe humanitarian and security conditions, as well as the increasing number of internally displaced persons, demand our serious consideration. All sides and non-State actors should stop attacks on humanitarian workers and ensure unhindered humanitarian access, especially to areas affected by famine. Similarly, perpetrators must be brought to justice. We must ensure that no destruction occurs in close proximity to homes, schools, hospitals and other life-saving infrastructure.

We call on international partners and donors to ensure the necessary funding for implementing the humanitarian response plan. We also urgently call for the cessation of hostilities by all parties and the implementation of security sector reforms so as to ensure the rule of law and bring an end to all impunity. Whenever possible, hybrid courts should be set up to carry out the process of transitional justice and reconciliation.

Furthermore, the engagement of women and youth would greatly promote conflict prevention and settlement processes. We therefore commend the appointment of women to the leadership organ of the National Dialogue Steering Committee and call for an additional increase in their numbers.

Lastly, the situation in South Sudan should remain a top priority for the Council. We pay sincere tribute to the personnel of UNMISS and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Shearer for their work on the ground in such a difficult environment. Kazakhstan will work with Council members and key actors in finding a lasting solution to the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

We are grateful for the information that Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Special Envoy Haysom have provided us at today's meeting. We recognize the work that they are doing in a situation as difficult as the one in South Sudan today.

Since the beginning of the year, we have been examining the situation in South Sudan on almost a monthly basis. Unfortunately, we have seen little progress in the political arena and hardly any advances in security and humanitarian situation, which remains the same or has even worsened in various parts of the country since last year. The revitalization of the political process and fostering the full implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan need to be our shared goals and understood as the only solution to the conflict.

In that regard, as we have said on previous occasions, we welcomed the announcement of the unilateral cessation of hostilities made by President Salva Kiir and the rollout of the national dialogue. Nevertheless,

it is clear that we need greater commitment from all parties so that those initiatives can be successfully implemented. We regret that, as the Secretary-General states in his report (S/2017/505), hostilities have not stopped, and confrontations continue in Upper Nile, Greater Equatoria, Greater Bahr el-Ghazal, Jonglei and Unity states.

We once again call on the Sudan People's Liberation Army and Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition to agree to the ceasefire, which would decrease tensions and constructively pave the way towards dialogue. The consequences of those confrontations have corresponded to the increase in the humanitarian needs of the millions of South Sudanese people who had to flee their homes. Since 2013, 3.8 million South Sudanese have had to leave their homes. As the Secretary-General's report indicates, since the beginning of this year alone, Uganda has hosted approximately 247,500 South Sudanese refugees. Those statistics are alarming, and we require the commitment of all parties to ensure that humanitarian aid arrives unhindered and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

Against that troubling backdrop, regional cooperation is vital for progress to be made in that regard. Bolivia welcomes the communiqué of the thirty-first Extraordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which took place on 2 June and was attended by the Commissioner of African Union Peace and Security Council, the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, representatives of the United Nations and the representatives of the troika on South Sudan. We concur with all the conclusions reached at that important meeting, which, in our opinion, brought together the key stakeholders interested in finding a solution to the conflict in South Sudan. Accordingly, I would like to underscore the following points contained in the communiqué, which calls on President Salva Kiir to

> "follow up the strict implementation of the ceasefire and ensure that his field commanders respect the ceasefire and take swift measure against those who violate his decision.
>
> "In this connection, the IGAD Summit urges the armed opposition groups to reciprocate the call for a ceasefire as well as to renounce violence ... [while emphasizing] that all armed opposition groups in South Sudan also share full responsibility on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and human rights violations occurring in South Sudan".
>
> Furthermore the communiqué expresses
>
> "concern on the obstacles facing humanitarian agencies including killings of humanitarian personnel and takes note of the progress made by the Government to address the issue of access through the establishment of the High-level Humanitarian Oversight Committee, and the opening of the new humanitarian corridors."

We especially welcome the convening of the High-level Revitalization Forum to breathe new life into the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. We hope that this will be an important element in efforts to advance the effective implementation of the peace agreement.

Concerning the deployment of the Regional Protection Force, we welcome the meeting with the Chiefs of Staff of the troop-contributing countries and the representatives of the Government of South Sudan to take up pending issues and set a definitive timetable for a full deployment to coordinate with the work of UNMISS. We are anxiously awaiting the outcome of that meeting.

Lastly, we would like to underscore the work of Special Representative David Shearer, Special Envoy Haysom and UNMISS. We wish them every success in their endeavours, and we offer them a full support and backing as they pursue the action going forward.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of South Sudan.

Mr. Malok (South Sudan): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council once again on this vitally important issue for my country. I would also like to thank, Mr. Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Mr. Haysom, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, for their kind briefings.

As I reported last month (see S/PV.7950), the national dialogue has been officially launched and the Steering Committee sworn in, and they have already begun their work. The national dialogue is a positive step in the right direction. The co-Chairs of the Steering Committee have begun their efforts to reach out to the stakeholders in South Sudan, as well as those outside

the country. The co-Chair of the Steering Committee is currently leading a delegation to South Africa to meet with Mr. Riek Machar, while the Deputy co-Chair is leading another delegation to Khartoum and Addis Ababa to meet with the other armed groups and political parties. It is the hope of the Government that all stakeholders will join the national dialogue initiative.

The national dialogue should not be in any way seen as a replacement for the peace agreement signed in 2015, but as a viable mechanism to resolve the political problems and end the war, which is causing death and suffering for the people of South Sudan. The Government assures the Council and the international community that it will not interfere in the national dialogue. The dialogue will be inclusive and its findings will be respected and adhered to by the Government.

The Government is engaging other armed groups in the country. In the recent weeks, other armed groups from Yei River state, Raja, the Luo tribe in Wau state and in the greater Jonglei have agreed to put down their weapons and join the national dialogue. There are also positive initiatives being conducted by His Excellency President Museveni of Uganda to reunify the factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and to encourage them to join the national dialogue. We reiterate our commitment to the deployment of the Regional Protection Force. Its deployment will also address the concerns of those stakeholders who would feel a sense of insecurity should they return to the country now.

My delegation would like to emphasize that it is not the policy of the Government to hinder the work of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the humanitarian actors. UNMISS is in South Sudan at the invitation of the Government and we have every intention to support it. Most of the violations reported are usually at lower levels. We urge UNMISS to coordinate with the Government by immediately reporting incidents of impediments as they happen, so that perpetrators are brought to book. It is in that light that the President issued a decree that gives strict instructions for all roadblocks to be removed and for all field commanders to grant unhindered access to UNMISS and the humanitarian actors.

Since the President declared the unilateral ceasefire, there has not been any active and direct confrontation between the Government and rebel groups. The overall security situation in the country is relatively calm. However, the ceasefire still faces challenges as other stakeholders are yet to declare their own ceasefire. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition forces allied to Riek Machar resorted to conducting attacks with the intention to cause instability and to seek attention from the international community. The Transitional Government of National Unity strongly condemns the most recent attack by the former Vice-President's group on a civilian bus being escorted from Nimule to Juba.

In order for the unilateral ceasefire to hold, we call upon the Security Council and the international community to ask the other stakeholders to respect the ceasefire so as to allow humanitarian actors to deliver aid to those areas in need. From the side of the Government, I wish to assure the Council that it is fully committed to the unilateral ceasefire. We also call on the Security Council and the international community to discourage the moral equivalence approach, which causes the other stakeholders to take advantage. There is a need to pinpoint exactly who is in violation and when.

The general amnesty issued by the Government to those who denounce violence is not intended to obstruct accountability and justice, but to create an environment that would allow people to come back and join the national dialogue. It is the firm belief of the Government that people should be held accountable for their actions following due process.

The humanitarian situation in the country continues to be of great concern. Climate change, which also affects the region, and falling oil prices have had adverse effects on the economic situation and prevented the Government from being able to address the crisis. The Government is working to put measures in place, which include collecting non-oil revenues, reducing expenditures and strengthening the banking and monetary system. The results of those measures cannot be seen overnight. We call on our friends and partners to step in and help the Government avert a crisis.

We recognize our shared objective of bringing sustainable and lasting peace, security and stability to our country. The Transitional Government of National Unity is grateful for the efforts and initiatives being exerted by the leaders of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union and all friends and partners of South Sudan. We thank the men and women in police and military uniform and the civilian components of UNMISS, as well as the

humanitarian actors, for their unwavering and tireless efforts in helping the people of South Sudan

The Transitional Government of National Unity remains committed to finding peace, stability and prosperity for South Sudan and to working with UNMISS and humanitarian actors. At this critical juncture, when the Transitional Government of National Unity is seeking to bring about peace, reconciliation and healing through the national dialogue, we hope that the Security Council, United Nations and the international community will positively support those efforts, instead of the scepticism, negative messages and threats of sanctions being sent out by some.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7983

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7983rd meeting

Tuesday, 27 June 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Solíz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure, Mr. President, to see you presiding over today's meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to start by giving a summary of what is our own analysis based on the latest developments and of some of the possible future steps ahead. As usual in Syria, we have a mixed picture, and that is what I would like to refer to.

There have been some interesting technical steps taken in advance of the seventh round of intra-Syrian talks, which, as Council members know very well by now, will take place from 10 to 14 July. In addition, there are currently serious efforts under way to deliver further agreements, in particular an implementation agreement regarding the de-escalation zones, before an Astana meeting that is planned for 4 and 5 July. But there have also been some worrying developments that we cannot ignore and upon which I will elaborate. We are at the time of testing whether or not the political will exists for real de-escalation and more meaningful political talks and for moving beyond preparatory talks.

Throughout this period, the United Nations has been quite active, convening joint technical meetings with opposition experts seeking to support the efforts of the Astana guarantors on de-escalation, consulting widely, including in Moscow and Paris, and with many others, laying the basis for a new round of Geneva talks, and holding consultations with our colleagues in the European Union. I would like to map this out for the Council and look to where we can go next.

In the latest round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, I announced the establishment of a technical consultative process, which Council members might remember. It was the additional layer that we believe could be very helpful in actually abolishing layers by accelerating the real talks. This technical consultative process was meant to develop relevant options on constitutional and legal issues that would need to be considered and resolved anyway in relation to any proposal or position put forward in the formal sessions. This was designed in fact to help the formal talks make progress more expeditiously due to better preparation by ensuring that any negotiated transitional political process would enjoy solid technical, constitutional and legal foundations.

I can offer an example. Some time ago, as Council members will remember, we had a moment of truth in Afghanistan. This was many years ago. I was around then and some Council members here today were, too. There was a feeling that nothing was moving forward until a certain point, when there was a rush for a conference in Bonn. Much of the preparatory work, which sometimes appears to be tedious or inconclusive, I have been told by those who were part of the Bonn conference, was immediately put into action and utilized as homework prepared for the conference. In a certain way, we are doing something similar, doing our homework as we wait for the real, major Geneva conference, God willing.

We made it clear that the consultative process created was technical. It is also true and well known that everything we do is political, but the particular emphasis in this case was on the words "technical", "experts" and "non-binding in nature". It was and is not designed to act as a negotiating forum to take on the political responsibility of the formal sessions or to take on itself the Syrian people's right to determine the constitutional future of the State of Syria, but it is a serious process because it does prepare for all of that.

Council members will recall that both the Government and the three opposition invitees in the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva all agreed last time, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), to participate in separate consultations and the consultative process. We were able to do so separately for at least two days, but since then we have seen a potentially significant new development. On 15 and 16 June, a few days ago,

opposition experts from the high-level negotiations committee and the Cairo and the Moscow platforms jointly convened and sat down together in the same room in Geneva at the behest of the United Nations, within the framework of the consultative process. That was the first time a joint set of United Nations meetings with the opposition invitees in one room had taken place — not only according to protocol but in a context of substantive discussions among them and us, which lasted the entire day. We believe that we must build on that.

The opposition experts worked to develop joint technical options with regard to the schedule process for drafting a new Constitution and its popular approval. They also discussed the principles involved, covering the substance of what are known as the living 12 points, which we had put forward in the fourth round of talks. The experts also discussed those issues in the context of a negotiated, political transition process within the framework of relevant Security Council resolutions.

While such expert meetings are by nature exploratory and non-binding, the joint meeting brought to light welcome similarities and common technical and perhaps even political understanding of various issues and could potentially be the beginning of a greater technical coordination among the three groups. We hope that the Security Council will help us support the three groups in that regard so as to show unity. The participants felt that additional work could yield even more productive results. My Office has accordingly invited them to participate next week in a further set of joint meetings within the framework of the consultative process on constitutional and legal issues ahead of the seventh round of formal intra-Syrian talks to take place in July.

Members will recall that the Government of Syria — which was, by the way, the first to commit to the technical process — communicated to me that it would participate in expert meetings within the framework of the technical consultations process during formal sessions of the intra-Syrian talks, but not outside those formal occasions. I therefore look forward to experts from my team continuing during the seventh round the engagement that began with experts from the Government during the sixth round. Of course, the United Nations remains ready to engage with the Government experts at any mutually convenient time, including before and after formal talks.

In my formal invitation to the forthcoming round of the intra-Syrian talks, I encouraged invitees to prepare actively. I therefore look forward to their engaging in an intensified set of discussions on issues across all four baskets: Governance issues, constitutional issues, electoral issues and counter-terrorism, security-governance and medium-term confidence-building issues. I hope that it will be possible to accelerate the peace talks. I am giving consideration, in fact, to sharing some of my own thinking on certain issues so as to stimulate discussions among the parties.

If the environment is propitious, I am also ready to facilitate direct talks between the Government and the opposition and hopefully unify the opposition in those talks, either at the formal or technical level. That is something that, on more than one occasion, all sides have stated that they want, and I hope that conditions are being established that could enable such a scenario. I also believe that it is important to aim for a further round of talks near the end of August or the beginning of September in advance of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly in September.

Both during and between the upcoming rounds of formal talks and expert meetings, my team will continue to closely engage with the members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and civil society support groups and listen to their own suggestions and practical advice. In particular, my team and I continue to strive to engage and give priority to more women's organizations, including those working across and inside Syria during and between rounds of intra-Syrian talks. In that context, I should note that, following the last round of intra-Syrian talks, we initiated our civil society role, which allowed us to consult with more than 50 civil society organizations and experts from all walks of life in various areas of expertise from both within and outside Syria. The more that we engage with such interlocutors, the more we are convinced that civil society will be critical to preserving and regenerating the social cohesion of a country that for too long has been torn apart by war.

As we advance the overall political effort unfolding under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva, the efforts of the three guarantors of the Astana process continue to finalize modalities for the implementation of the memorandum of understanding on the four de-escalation zones that they concluded on 4 May. As mentioned, a meeting of the guarantors is planned to take place in Astana on 4 and 5 July. I plan to be

present at that meeting. With every week that passes, as we know, without a final arrangement to finalize those zones, the fragility of the ceasefire regime and the risk posed by that fragility increase. I am aware of the genuine efforts currently being undertaken to try to end and overcome the remaining obstacles, as was witnessed by my own team of experts from my own Office during the recently held technical-level meeting of the joint working group on de-escalation in Moscow.

The United Nations team continues to stand ready to provide technical advice whenever and wherever needed because we need success in Astana, just as Astana desperately needs success in the Geneva political process so as to consolidate what we are all trying to do. Let us therefore give de-escalation a fair chance to succeed because that is what people are asking so as to further decrease the violence and enable confidence-building. I also expressed the hope that the discussions aimed at finding a suitable formula for addressing the difficult situations that have emerged in the southern part of Syria will also yield positive results.

As we plan for the Geneva intra-Syrian talks and as the Astana guarantors work towards de-escalation, let us recall what has been achieved and some of the challenges that remain on the ground. Since the three guarantor States signed the de-escalation memorandum in Astana on 4 May, the level of violence has clearly decreased. Hundreds of Syrian lives continue to be spared every week, and many towns have returned to some degree of normalcy. That is a good general trend, but we do not see that same good trend everywhere. In some areas, the fighting and violence have continued and, in fact, intensified.

On the other hand, we must recognize that regrettably, the general significant improvement of the security situation has not yielded equally significant progress in providing humanitarian access to areas where needs are greatest. The support of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) co-chairs and of other members of the ISSG has been helpful and efforts continue. However, let us be honest — much more needs to be done and urgently to enable safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all Syrians, wherever they are, in particular hard-to-reach areas.

Let me also stress the importance of moving forward on the issues of detainees, abductees, missing people and on the important issue of humanitarian demining. In that regard, I would like to thank the United Nations Mine Action Service for its continuing engagement.

We note that the fight against terrorists appears to be proceeding with Da'esh under pressure and in retreat in various locations in Syria. At the same time, incidents between the international coalition to counter Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh and forces of the Government of Syria and its allies, including the downing of a Syrian military plane, have taken place. As I see it, we hope that the ideal trajectory over the coming two weeks could be — indeed, would be — progress in Astana on 4 and 5 July; a further set of joint technical aspect meetings with opposition groups during that same week; and continuing discussion and dialogue among the main international stakeholders, including at the Group of 20 Summit in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July, at which the issue of Syria will most certainly be discussed. That is all in support of the Astana de-escalation efforts and the intra-Syrian Geneva-based political process.

I hope that a combination of all those elements will help shape an environment that is conducive to the next round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva in the coming months and bring us one step closer on the journey to our shared goal of implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions and, in particular resolution 2254 (2015). All political efforts of the United Nations are directed towards that end and, with the guidance of the Secretary-General, we continue to count on the strong support of all members of the Security Council, as a whole.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. de Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): There is no doubt that the crisis in Syria is one of the most serious topics under consideration by the Security Council. That is why my delegation, which represents an elected member of the Security Council, understands that it has a duty to share its opinion on such a grave international issue with the Council's electorate — its members.

Once again, we thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and his entire team for their tireless efforts in the

quest for a political solution in Syria, and we reiterate Uruguay's full confidence in their efforts.

We acknowledge the announcement of the resumption of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, which will begin on 10 July, as well as the intention to convene successive meetings in the coming months. We commend Mr. De Mistura on the fact that representatives of civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations, will take part in all meetings to be held in Geneva. The role played by civil society organizations and by women's organizations in particular is extremely important and could contribute immensely to the discussions.

Following the conclusion of the sixth round of talks and ongoing contact and discussions with the parties since then, maintaining the momentum of the meetings in Geneva was required in order to work on implementing agreements made and to allow for tangible progress to be made on the four baskets of topics highlighted in the road map provided by resolution 2254 (2015). At the same time, the meeting that will be held next week in Astana will provide an opportunity to reinforce the cessation of hostilities agreement and to draft the details for the implementation of the safe zones that were established at the beginning at the beginning of May by the three guarantor countries.

Almost two months after the signing of the memorandum establishing the safe zones, which Uruguay believes was a major step forward in strengthening the cessation of hostilities agreement and in reducing extreme violence in the majority of the country, we still do not have official information on the implementation of the agreement and we are concerned about the fact that unhindered access to those areas has not been granted to the United Nations. We reiterate that it is crucial for the guarantor countries to ensure humanitarian access and the free movement of people wishing to enter and leave those areas at will.

The Geneva and Astana processes are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. It is for that reason that tangible results must be achieved in Astana in order to reduce violence and guarantee the cessation of hostilities in the four safe zones. In that way, the next round of Geneva talks will take place in a positive environment in which further progress can be made.

On previous occasions, we have mentioned that the United Nations and the Special Envoy are not the protagonists in the tragedy that has been taking place in Syria since 2011; they merely mediate between the parties. The primary responsibility for ending the conflict lies directly with the Syrians themselves — on the one hand, the Government and, on the other, all individuals and entities that make up the opposition, including the almost 100 armed groups that operate in Syria, many of them with fighters, funding and foreign military support. The absurd fragmentation of the Syrian opposition, along with the foreign presence and military support, exacerbate an already major problem. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy to guarantee the inclusiveness of the process of political transition in Syria and we are pleased to be able to acknowledge the fact that civil society, including religious leaders and women's groups, is taking part.

Another kind of responsibility lies with third States, in the region and outside of it, that directly or indirectly take part in the situation in Syria, working towards objectives that are almost always far removed from the real goals and aspirations of the Syrian people. In that regard, Uruguay understands that the Security Council's responsibility in this issue is to continue applying pressure and persuasion to ensure that the parties to the conflict remain at the negotiating table in order to make gradual progress on the road map outlined in resolution 2254 (2015).

It is more important now than ever to strengthen political will in the three multilateral forums in which the crisis in Syria is being discussed: the Security Council, negotiations in Geneva, and the Astana process. A few days ago marked a year and a half since the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015). At the time, all of us present knew that we had a historic opportunity to end the crisis. Regrettably, despite the good intentions of the Special Envoy and successive efforts to implement the resolution's provisions, little progress has been made on the road map since then.

In addition to the enormous humanitarian costs of the crisis in Syria, the conflict has also been a driver of violent extremism and fundamentalist terrorism and, consequently, is a key factor in instability in the Middle East and in the rest of the world.

In conclusion, we reiterate our belief that there is no place for a military solution to the conflict. Only through a political transition process, implemented by the Syrians and mediated by the United Nations, will we be able to emerge from this web and stop the humanitarian tragedy.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, for his insightful update and commend him for his exceptional commitment and determination to pursue peace in Syria. My delegation would like to share the following observations and recommendations.

On the purely political track, Kazakhstan remains committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to ensuring the continuity of State institutions. My country is pleased to note the gradual progress in the political settlement of the Syrian conflict during the Geneva and Astana meetings.

We draw attention to the reduced military activity and improvement of the humanitarian situation in the four de-escalation zones. Astana reaffirms its readiness to further promote the political process to achieve peace and stability in Syria.

Like others, we call on members of the Security Council to use their influence in order to consolidate the national ceasefire regime and contribute to the success of agreements reached in Astana. We call on Council members to unanimously support the Geneva and Astana platforms, as well as the additional mechanisms developed within them, such as the memorandum on de-escalation zones. Such a joint approach would help to produce a ceasefire and to oblige the Syrian Government and rebel forces to end their battles.

Kazakhstan considers it both useful and relevant to agree on an additional format for United Nations interaction with the parties to the conflict through informal technical meetings of experts, at which issues related to the Syrian constitution are discussed. We support Special Envoy De Mistura's view that these technical meetings can become an opportunity to unite the opposing platforms. Let us endeavour to bring about a new peaceful life in Syria. We welcome and support the multifaceted diplomacy he is conducting to resolve the Syrian crisis. We believe that the more countries are positively involved in the solution of the Syrian question, the sooner we will see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Kazakhstan believes that in searching for an exit strategy, a regional approach should be considered as a very effective method to mitigate the situation and prevent further deterioration. We therefore call on all Middle Eastern/Gulf region States to join the guarantor countries and do everything possible to ensure that the ceasefire regime is respected and observed by all parties.

It is clear that to see further progress, there is a strong need to continue supporting the objectives and gains made thus far in the Astana and Geneva negotiations and through the other three guarantors in order to see further positive outcomes.

On the counter-terrorism track, in our opinion the inconsistency of the struggle against terrorist organizations in Syria slows down the political settlement significantly. Actions based on the "we will manage ourselves" principle are counterproductive, and their consequences are predictable and hazardous. We call on the international coalition forces operating in the provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor to exercise caution in conducting military operations with a view to averting accidental civilian deaths, including of women and children. We recognize the need for further joint international efforts to counter the constant terrorist and extremist threats, which must be coordinated between the various sides through a unified strategy.

On the humanitarian track, we emphasize the importance of expanding humanitarian assistance to Syria, including an increase in medical assistance to civilians in areas where the ceasefire is respected. Rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access should be provided and conditions created to deliver medical aid to the local population to meet their basic needs. Aviation targets identified by any party should exclude such infrastructure facilities as bridges, oil and gas wells, dams and power plants — in other words, all critical infrastructure. We have a moral duty not to drive the future generation of Syrians into burdensome bondage, requiring them to rebuild every structure that has been destroyed.

Finally, the focus of the Syrian political track must now be on establishing sound governance, the formulation and consolidation of a new constitution, as well as new, United Nations-supervised elections. It is therefore important to preserve unity among the Council members, as demonstrated in the adoption of resolution 2336 (2016). Only then can there be determined action to speedily alleviate the burden of long-protracted war on the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7984

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7984th meeting

Tuesday, 27 June 2017, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/282)

Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2017/510)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/282)

Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2017/510)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I should like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2017/282, which contains the text of a letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, as well as to document S/2017/510, which contains the thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Zarif and by Ambassador Olof Skoog, Permanent Representative of Sweden, in his capacity as Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zarif.

Mr. Zarif: It is a pleasure to be here today to present the Secretary-General's latest report on Liberia, dated 16 June (S/2017/510).

As the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) enters the final phase of its mandate, Liberia has remained stable. No major threats are envisaged beyond possible isolated and sporadic incidents of a public-order nature in the context of the presidential and legislative elections in October, and the subsequent transition of Government in January. It will be crucial for Liberia's law-enforcement agencies to be adequately prepared to respond to potential low-level civil unrest and mob violence during this delicate period. Current limitations in manpower, equipment and mobility may restrict the ability of these agencies to respond to multiple simultaneous security incidents.

UNMIL is supporting the Liberia National Police in elaborating an integrated election-security plan to ensure the most effective utilization of available resources to protect civilians. The Liberia National Police has also conducted community-policing activities across the country aimed at building trust and communication with the population ahead of the elections. UNMIL, in collaboration with the Government and local actors, including Liberian traditional communicators, has undertaken public-awareness campaigns country-wide to mitigate the risk of mob justice and encourage adherence to the rule of law.

UNMIL stands ready to respond to any situation amounting to a risk of strategic reversal of peace and stability. Yet the extent of this response will be restricted by the reduced Mission capacity, the low number of uniformed personnel and the potentially competing mandated task of protecting United Nations personnel. At present, UNMIL has 260 personnel in its two formed police units and 230 personnel of the Nigerian infantry company.

We presently maintain only two field offices, in the north-east and the north-west. Formed police units and force personnel are deployed only in Monrovia, which significantly limits our capacity to intervene. This is a significant change from the last two presidential elections, when UNMIL had a country-wide presence. Other factors could also have an impact on our ability to perform our mandate. Any substantial reduction, therefore, in the modest and lean budget we submitted to the General Assembly would significantly affect the ability of UNMIL to deliver on the mandate given by the Council.

While UNMIL is preparing for the transition of residual mandated activities to the Government of Liberia, the United Nations country team and other partners, it remains fully engaged in all aspects of its mandate, with a particular emphasis on good offices and political facilitation. As the elections draw closer, the Mission has further intensified its engagement with

the National Elections Commission, political party leaders, presidential candidates, the Government and civil society to prevent and defuse tensions, help resolve disputes and advocate for inclusive, transparent, credible and peaceful elections. The country's future as a stable democracy will hinge on the successful conduct of the October elections and broad agreement that they were free and fair, followed by a smooth transfer of power from the current Government to a new Administration. There are many presidential candidates, including the incumbent Vice-President and several formidable opposition-party candidates, who will almost certainly have to form coalitions to enhance their chances in a possible run-off.

At the initiative of the Government, the Interreligious Council of Liberia organized, on 31 May and 1 June 2017, a national forum of all political party leaders, culminating in the parties' commitment to a violence-free electoral process and transfer of power. The commitment, referred to as the Farmington River Declaration, built on a combination of agreements previously reached among the parties. The Declaration also endorsed the establishment of a peace and mediation committee to help guide relations among and between the political parties and State institutions for a peaceful transition. The Declaration was formalized on 4 June 2017 during the summit conference of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Heads of State. UNMIL, the African Union and ECOWAS collectively engaged with the parties to ensure their support for this significant initiative.

The Government also submitted a draft bill on arrangements for the smooth transition of authority to a new Government. The Government has established a transition team that will attend to asset transfers, handover notes and other matters, so as to ensure that the incoming Government assumes its functions as seamlessly as possible.

On 8 June, the Senate proposed to amend part XII of the Code of Conduct law, with which the House of Representatives concurred on 13 June. The amendment, inter alia, seeks to provide a governing framework for the operations of the Office of the Ombudsman. The amendment also requires that electoral matters be adjudicated by the National Elections Commission in the first instance, with appeals to the Supreme Court, which has caused additional uncertainty about the eligibility of candidates for nomination, which process started on 19 June.

Meanwhile, the exhibition of the provisional registration roll, which took place from 12 to 17 June, encountered technical issues, including, reportedly, missing names and photographs of several individuals, although the Commission has claimed that all registered individuals will be allowed to vote in October. It will be important that the Commission address these challenges so as to prevent uncertainty in connection with the process and its results, which could lead to distrust and amplify existing problems.

Despite the important gains made over the years of post-conflict recovery, Liberia continues to face considerable challenges, which weigh heavily on efforts to sustain peace and advance national reconciliation. Critical legislative reforms, widely accepted as minimum requirements to address the underlying causes of conflict, most notably the land rights bill and the local governance bill, are yet to be enacted. The decisive steps needed to help bring more security to the lives of women have yet to be taken, including the passage of the domestic violence bill. I continue to engage vigorously with the Government, particularly the Legislature, to help advance these transformational reforms.

I am encouraged by the gradual strengthening of Liberia's human rights capacity, illustrated, for example, by the recent international accreditation of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights following several years of UNMIL's technical support in capacity-building. The Commission must intensify its efforts to address the serious human rights challenges, including sexual and gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices and challenges with respect to freedom of speech, which continue to plague Liberia. For instance, over the past two weeks, from late May to early June, UNMIL counted seven reported cases of rape, both by individuals and gang rape, of minors, including children of both sexes. The Government should implement as a matter of urgency the salient recommendations of the 2016 UNMIL-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights report on addressing impunity for rape in Liberia. In this regard, UNMIL has stepped up media activities and interactive programming on the themes of sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, national reconciliation and the promotion of human rights.

On 4 April, the Secretary-General transmitted to the Security Council the Liberia peacebuilding plan,

which was developed in consultation with national and international stakeholders by the United Nations system and the Government of Liberia. The plan identifies key actions set to take place before 30 March 2018, when UNMIL's substantive mandate ends, and outlines the level of necessary political engagement. The peacebuilding plan provides the basis for the United Nations system's integrated transition plan, which is currently being finalized in consultation with the Government and civil-society actors.

Sustaining peace in Liberia must look to horizons beyond the immediate needs of the transition process, requiring long-term investment in national institutions that are inclusive, accountable and responsive, providing opportunities and services to all Liberians. To that end, the Government has started developing specific actions for the implementation of each of its commitments under the plan, and the Mission is assisting with this process to, hopefully, ensure that it is done in a timely and successful manner. In that context, I would like to express my appreciation for the helpful assistance from the Peacebuilding Commission's configuration for Liberia, chaired by Ambassador Skoog, who has just completed a very useful visit to the country.

The United Nations country team recently completed a capacity mapping exercise to assess its readiness to provide strategic and programmatic support to Liberia after UNMIL's departure. The findings showed that it will need significant assistance to increase its capacity, resources and expertise. Efforts are currently under way to mobilize support so that the transition from UNMIL to the country team is conducted seamlessly and responsibly and can effectively support Liberia's efforts to achieve sustainable peace.

One programmatic aspect is the establishment of an independent presence for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is essential for monitoring and capacity-building. With regard to financing, a Liberia transition multipartner trust fund, aimed at making the country team's funding and operations more predictable, is being discussed. Given that most of the priorities outlined in the Liberia peacebuilding plan require the country team's medium-to-long-term engagement, it will be essential to ensure that Liberia has the international community's sustained political and financial support. In that regard, we are also discussing an international conference that will enable the new Liberian Government to share its national priorities. It could be organized for April 2018, when there will be a review of the statement of mutual commitments, which, together with the peacebuilding plan, could form the basis for a framework of mutual accountability between the new Government and the international community, as represented by the United Nations.

It is therefore a concern that the most recent draft of the national budget for 2017-2018 has little room for investment in social and economic intervention, which is essential if the key drivers of conflict are to be addressed. Currently, 94 per cent of the estimated $526.5 million budget is committed to recurring costs, including payrolls, leaving just $27.3 million — I repeat, just $27.3 million — for public-sector investment plans. At the same time, the budget is 12.3 per cent lower than the 2016-2017 budget of $600.2 million. The continuing shortfalls in national resources for supporting Liberia's transition and consolidating peace will be felt even more acutely as international donor assistance declines.

Liberia has made remarkable progress since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra in 2003. However, challenges that pose a risk of reversal still remain. The Government of Liberia, the United Nations system and the wider international community must continue to address them with all the energy and innovation available to them if we are to preserve and reinforce the gains made in the intervening years. I appeal to all concerned to increase and consolidate their investment in Liberia and support the country at this crucial time, through its transition to a new Government and beyond.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Zarif for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Skoog.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to brief the Security Council in my capacity as Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. It gives me great pleasure to share with the Council some of the main takeaways from my recent trip to Liberia. The objective of my visit of 14 and 15 June was to follow up on progress made in the implementation of the peacebuilding plan; discuss preparations for the upcoming elections; consult with stakeholders on key reforms related to land rights and decentralization; and identify ways in which the Peacebuilding Commission can best offer support during the upcoming transitions.

I was fortunate enough to be able to meet with a wide range of stakeholders, including President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Deputy Ministers from the departments of internal affairs, foreign affairs and finance, as well as the Ministry of Justice. I also met with representatives of civil society, youth representatives, political parties, the National Elections Commission, the Chief Justice and Supreme Court justices, and representatives of the international community. At this point I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Liberia and his delegation for being consistently supportive of my visits, and to say that working with Liberia, as part of the Peacebuilding Commission, has been an exceptionally good experience. It is a pleasure to work with a country that is itself so committed to working with the Commission.

In my meetings, I welcomed the dedicated, inclusive and swift efforts of the Government and of the United Nations to develop a peacebuilding plan in response to the Council's resolution 2333 (2016). I also stressed the importance of undertaking key structural reforms, as set out in phase I of the peacebuilding plan, which will help to address some of the root causes of conflict in Liberia. That includes the enacting of important bills on issues such as land rights, local Government and domestic violence. I also urged all stakeholders to contribute to free and fair elections, prioritize women's strong participation in them and involve young people throughout the process. In addition to the rich briefing we have just heard by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I would like to share the impressions with which I left Monrovia.

As we have noted in the past couple of months, Liberia is at a critical juncture. Several historic transitions are under way. The situation therefore requires, and deserves, the dedicated attention of international partners in the months ahead. While no one I met suggested to me that there is a clear or imminent risk of a relapse into conflict, there are real hurdles ahead as the peacekeeping Mission closes down and the new Government takes the reins. We know that the main root causes of conflict in Liberia must continue to be addressed. Reconciliation, land use, decentralization, access to justice, and violence against women are among the more critical issues that are still to be resolved and that will determine whether Liberia moves towards a true and lasting consolidation of peace. As we just heard, the limited fiscal capacity to take reforms forward under the current Administration may itself lead to increased grievances. Diversification and revitalization of the economy are desperately needed.

On the security side, the overall situation remains stable. While the Government successfully resumed responsibility for its security as of July 2016, there is still work to be done to further build the capacity of security actors, including the armed forces and the Liberia National Police. Efforts aimed at strengthening access to justice and the rule of law are equally important and remain vital to fostering a sense of inclusion and social cohesion and to building trust in national institutions.

In four months' time, Liberians will be heading to the polls, and the preparations for elections are well under way. They have been described as a defining moment for Liberia, one in which the country will see the first democratic transfer of power in its modern history. Successful elections and a peaceful transition will undoubtedly help to consolidate democracy and good governance. During our visit, the National Elections Commission was working on a voter registration exhibition designed to address irregularities in the registration process. As we just heard, in a welcome move earlier this month, political parties signed the Farmington River declaration on the margins of the Summit of the Economic Community of West African States in Monrovia, in which they committed to peaceful elections.

The other challenges outstanding pertain to a funding gap for the activities of the Elections Commission and to controversies related to the application of the code of conduct, and should be addressed and resolved as soon as possible. In addition, we should stress the continuing need for civic education, awareness-raising and outreach to a largely disenfranchised population ahead of the election, and for increased efforts to ensure strong participation by women. The fact that the election is taking place during the rainy season is a complicating factor.

As of now, 22 political parties are fielding candidates. Some stakeholders have expressed worries about the fact that candidates may be running on personalized platforms and may mobilize voters around identity politics instead of running policy-based campaigns. I encouraged representatives of political parties to focus their campaigning on the key issues confronting the country rather than mobilizing around tribal politics. I commend the active and important role played by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

generally, and the Office of the Special Representative in particular, in facilitating dialogue in the run-up to the election. In my discussions with both the National Elections Commission and the Chief Justice, I once again stressed the need for solid mechanisms for swift dispute resolution and for managing run-offs, which they confirmed are in place.

During my meetings with a range of stakeholders, I noted a broad sense of ownership of the Liberia peacebuilding plan. Its commitments set out a clear road map for addressing the country's remaining peacebuilding challenges. Financing for the implementation of the commitments made remains an outstanding issue.

In meetings with the United Nations system in Monrovia, I discussed the kind of support that the United Nations can provide in taking those commitments forward in the light of the UNMIL drawdown and the coming transition in the United Nations presence. In that regard, I commend the United Nations country team for having carried out robust mapping of its capacities. I believe that it may be the first of its kind.

This has clearly been a highly useful exercise. It has provided a clear point of departure and has enabled the whole United Nations system in Liberia to think strategically about the transition and about how to increase capacity in the country team as UNMIL leaves, so that it can take over support for residual tasks. However, it also means that we have a very clear picture of what will be needed in the future. It is worrying to note that, as UNMIL draws down, the United Nations will clearly face a cliff in terms of resources, capacities and expertise for the support of peacebuilding.

Given those capacity constraints and based on the Peacebuilding Commission's experience with the United Nations transition in Sierra Leone, several members of the Peacebuilding Commission have flagged concerns about UNMIL's transition to the country team. The Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission could help the United Nations system to identify how to responsibly manage the transition and how to ensure predictable financing for peacebuilding in Liberia during the critical transition phase.

We commend the efforts of UNMIL over the past 13 years. As the peacekeeping mission withdraws, it will serve as a test case for the United Nations system and Liberia in the fulfilment of peacebuilding and sustaining-peace goals and tasks. Liberia has come a long way since the conflict ended, and much progress has been achieved. However, the current situation means that the indicators of fragility continue to exist, in particular insufficient progress on reconciliation and on needed legislation for addressing the root causes of the conflict, the weak economy and the upcoming election, where the stakes are high. Liberia's international partners have a collective responsibility to make sure that the investments made over the past 13 years, through peacekeeping, are safeguarded, and to build on those investments in order to consolidate the peace in Liberia. That includes ensuring that the remaining United Nations presence is configured and provided with sufficient resources to respond to the ongoing needs of the Liberian people through peacebuilding support.

In his recent trip to New York, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General ElHillo stated that

> "Liberia represents a success story in peacekeeping. We now must ensure that it is also a success in peacebuilding."

That will require innovative thinking on how to secure reliable resources once UNMIL has departed, and the Security Council has a key role to play in the process. For our part, the Peacebuilding Commission stands ready to continue its political accompaniment, ensuring continued international attention after the peacekeepers have left and insisting on drawing attention to gaps. We will undertake continued advocacy on the importance of pursuing reforms that are central for sustaining peace in Liberia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ambassador Skoog for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Farid Zarif, and the Permanent Representative of Sweden and Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Olof Skoog, for their comprehensive briefings.

Uruguay congratulates the Government and the people of Liberia for the progress achieved in bringing stability to the country. It is also important to recognize that the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has played a leading role in this process for more than

13 years. Liberia is currently going through a crucial moment on the eve of the presidential and legislative elections, and less than a year before the definitive termination of UNMIL, which was established under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The holding of presidential and legislative elections, which are scheduled for October, and the peaceful transfer of power in January 2018 will be important milestones in consolidating peace in Liberia. Uruguay is convinced that democratic processes that are conducted in a free, inclusive and transparent manner and with the highest possible participation of voters are precisely those that make it possible to forge a lasting peace. We note with satisfaction the efforts of the Government to implement State authority throughout Liberian territory. Only in that way will all of the country's inhabitants be able to benefit from the dividends of peace.

However, many challenges remain for Liberia. The country will need to step up its efforts in the area of security. It will also be necessary to address the root causes that fuelled the conflict in the past. With that in mind, it is essential to enact pertinent legislation on land-ownership rights and local administration. Furthermore, it will be important to strengthen State institutions that promote and ensure compliance with rules. Corruption is another scourge affecting Liberia that needs to be eliminated from all levels of Government so that it has solid, transparent and reliable institutions.

Uruguay notes with particular concern the human rights situation in Liberia, which is a fundamental aspect in which the desired progress has not yet been achieved. In order for the efforts focused on the stability and security of the country to be maintained in the long run, the protection and promotion of human rights will need to be one of the top priorities, together with accountability and such issues as restorative justice, truth and reconciliation. It is also a source of serious concern that there are many cases of sexual violence and gender violence, certain persistent harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and accusations of witchcraft, and restrictions on the freedom of expression. Sexual and gender-based violence, which has particularly affected girls, is a problem that must be urgently addressed.

The awareness-raising campaign about such cases, organized by UNMIL and the Liberian Ministry for Gender, Childhood and Social Protection, is a step in the right direction. However, efforts should be stepped up by the Government to prevent and respond to such crimes and put an end to the persistent impunity of those who perpetrate them. Bearing in mind the still precarious situation of human rights in Liberia, Uruguay would endorse the observations of the Secretary-General on the need to establish a satellite office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, especially in the light of the imminent withdrawal of UNMIL from the country.

Today's meeting offers us an excellent opportunity to congratulate UNMIL for its work in supporting the Government of Liberia and in providing protection to civilians, as well as for its contribution to achieving national peace and reconciliation in the country. Uruguay hopes to see the closure of UNMIL, a process that has been under way for some time, take place in a timely and successful manner. Our delegation also acknowledges the work of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission for its work with the Government and international and local partners and for its drafting of a peacebuilding plan for Liberia. In that regard, we would like to thank and particularly congratulate the Swedish delegation for its leadership.

The United Nations — in particular the Security Council, UNMIL and the Peacebuilding Commission — has provided support for the peace process in Liberia through various actions that will, we hope, together with the efforts of the people and the Government of Liberia, contribute to making Liberia a success story.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, on organizing today's meeting on the situation in Liberia, a fraternal and friendly country for Senegal, with which we share membership in all international organizations, and above all, our subregional organization, the Economic Community of West African States. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing. And I also thank our colleague and neighbour, Olof Skoog, Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his visit and for the briefing he has just given us about his visit. We look forward to the statement by our colleague the Permanent Representative of Liberia.

The Senegalese delegation would simply like to take the floor to recall the long way that Liberia has come to reach this day.

Since before the intervention of the United Nations, the subregional engagement of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group has contributed to stabilizing the country, ultimately leading to the stability and security of the situation in the country only a few months before the upcoming presidential and legislative elections in October, for which 22 political parties and coalitions will present their candidates and 2.1 million voters have registered, of whom — it is important to underscore — 48 per cent are women. Those elections are all the more important, as they will enshrine a historic and peaceful transition of power, while, at the same time, consolidating the transformation of Liberia and sustainably establishing peace and democracy within the context of the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The Liberian forces will then resume their sovereign right concerning security matters, with the support, when needed, of the Senegalese rapid-reaction force, which has been redeployed from the United Nations operation in the Congo to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and could be deployed from Mopti.

In that regard, the Senegalese delegation welcomes the various stakeholders' commitments to ensuring that the upcoming elections are held in a free and transparent manner and that all disputes are settled peacefully through established mechanisms and in accordance with the rule of law. Accordingly, we commend the important work carried out thus far by the National Elections Commission and call on the various stakeholders to lend it all the necessary support, in particular by providing the $1.8 million necessary to fill the gap for financing the electoral process.

On 23 January, the President of Liberia, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, presented her final annual state of the nation address, in which she identified national reconciliation the fight against corruption as the Government's priorities for the rest of her tenure. On 31 May and 1 June, the Government of Liberia, supported by UNMIL, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, hosted a national forum facilitated by the Interreligious Council of Liberia, which culminated on 4 June in the signing of the Farmington River Declaration by standard-bearers and political leaders of 20 out of the 22 registered political parties. The signatories to the Declaration declared their commitment to a peaceful electoral process and the transition of power to a new Government in January.

I stress the issue of elections because the Council has noted that, in the western part of Africa, electoral processes continue to be a source of tension. But I would also like to underscore the concern — which we should all share — with regard to the macroeconomic situation, which continues to be affected negatively by the general decline in commodity prices and the residual impact of the Ebola epidemic. The International Monetary Fund estimates that Liberia faces a significant shortfall in revenue despite receiving approximately $75 million in direct budget support from donors for the fiscal year 2016-2017.

The Council should therefore consider the importance of finding the optimal way of responding to the various challenges that continue to confront the country, especially by fully supporting the implementation of the peacebuilding plan developed by the Government of Liberia at the request of the Security Council, involving financial resources, institutional capacity-building and expertise. It is at such a price that, after having achieved making Liberia into a success story with regard to peacekeeping, the Council will continue to transform Liberia, thereby making it into a success story in terms of peacebuilding.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): I am honoured to address this meeting of the Security Council on behalf of the Government and the people of Liberia, and thank the Secretary-General for his thirty-third progress report (S/2017/510) on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zarif and Ambassador Skoog for their comments and statements, and thank the Ambassador of the brotherly State of Senegal.

Allow me, Sir, to draw your kind attention to three points.

The first is that the United Nations Mission in Liberia is a successful peacekeeping operation. Today, as the report confirms, Liberia is relatively secure and stable. From previous levels of up to 15,000 men and women, the United Nations Mission in Liberia will complete its mission and undergo a final drawdown in April 2018.

After nearly 14 years since the first peacekeeping boots landed on the bloody soil of my country, there is today no doubt that the peacekeeping mission can be credited with enabling and catalysing Liberia's ongoing political and economic transformation.

Notwithstanding the present challenges, where there formerly was pervasive hopelessness when the troops arrived, ours has come to be a more hopeful society. Where death and destruction once stalked our streets, a renewed commitment to democratic governance and the popular desire to rebuild the broken nation now drive the discourse and motivate a break with our tragic past. Having concluded the inclusive development of a peacebuilding plan consistent with resolution 2333 (2016), Liberia is seeking continued partnerships and support to sustain its peace and continue the needed reforms as the peacekeeping mission comes to a successful end.

That brings me to the second point. It was 73 years ago when a living President last democratically transferred power to another in Liberia. The inauguration in January 2018 of a new Liberian Administration will mark only the second time that that will have happened since 1847 — the year Liberia became independent. That historic significance is not lost on Liberians and further motivates our will to succeed. Lest we forget, beyond that historic significance, there are other important consequences linked to a successful holding of peaceful, democratic elections in Liberia.

We are proud to acknowledge that our West African subregion is expanding the space for democratic governance and the peaceful transition of power. Given the shared history and sociology of our region, in the same way in which it has been relatively easy to experience the spread of conflict and misery across our borders, peace and a renewed commitment to democratic governance — notwithstanding the obvious challenges — are now overtaking the subregional space of the Economic Community of West African States. Consequently, a successful holding of peaceful, democratic elections in Liberia will continue to pave the way for other important successes in expanding the democratic space across the West African subregion, as well as significantly impacting the consolidation of regional peace and security.

At home, many still wish that the election was about a choice of the best ideas in continuing to build a future of continued peace and development, and that, rather than the quantity of political parties, the ongoing competition would be flavoured by the quality of the political discourse. Imperfect as it currently is, we seem to be getting better with each attempt at institutionalizing the process of democratic change.

It must also be noted that the mere exercise of the choice to freely and fairly elect the leaders of our country, with a sense of growing regularity and confidence in both the electoral processes and associated outcomes, meaningfully contributes to deepening a new culture of peace, lends itself to democratic governance and expressions, empowers ordinary citizens and keeps the elected leaders duly accountable. We intend to continue along that path in order to resolve the attending irregularities, improve upon the imperfections and deepen public confidence, not only in the usefulness of democratic elections, but also in the sustainable values of democratic transitions and governance.

That is why the National Elections Commission and other relevant stakeholders are working to resolve irregularities that may have arisen from the recent registration of qualified voters. Liberians know that we win — all of us will be winners — if, once again, this ground-breaking election proves to inspire public confidence in the electoral process and if the outcomes are based on the free, fair, credible and transparent exercise of the public's rights and duties as responsible citizens. Let me therefore assure the Council that for the Liberian Government and people, to achieve that important undertaking there is no lack of political will. However, as we are beginning to see, political will may not necessarily be enough.

The report of the Secretary-General is comprehensive, including in its description of the depressing state of the Liberian economy. That is why, despite the various austerity measures currently being implemented, the Liberian Government is growing concerned about a $17.5 million funding gap for the implementation of the activities of the National Elections Commission. So far, out of the $45 million requested by the National Elections Commission, the Liberian Government has committed to the payment of $20 million and the international community has committed about $8 million. The difference is yet to be committed.

That brings me to the final point. Despite the many challenges that lie ahead, Liberians are still growing in confidence about the future of our country. Indeed,

arriving at where we are has been a long, costly and arduous journey. We pay special homage to all those who made the ultimate sacrifice — voluntarily and involuntarily — to get us here and we are grateful to the United Nations, its various specialized agencies, as well as our multilateral, regional and bilateral partners for their continued support and accompaniment. We also reserve special thanks for the people of Liberia for their continued resilience and steadfast belief both in the ongoing transformation of Liberia and in a future of togetherness, security and peace. Especially in that light, the report broadly confirms that we have not, as yet, begun to run as we know we can. But the truth is also that Liberians are no longer standing still, weighed down by a dehumanizing sense of hopelessness or the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead in sustaining our peace.

We know that a more just, equitable and inclusive society is the pillar required to strengthen the peace and security architecture whose foundations we were enabled to establish. We know that change is hard, but change we must to realize the benefits of the enormous potential in human and other natural resources with which we have been blessed. We know that we must continue to be transparent in the management of our resources and accountable to each other, including in confronting the darkness of our tragic past and therefrom forever inscribe its valuable lessons on the national consciousness. We know we must continue to reform not only the things that are easy, but also the ones that are difficult and necessary, including laws concerning rights to land, local Government and domestic violence, because they pronounce upon our overall ability to sustain our peace.

Those are all various forms of development and fruition. Of course, we wish the pace were faster, but we must also heed one of the stand-out lessons from our tragic past, which is that it is best to lead where others follow. That is even more profound for countries such as ours, emerging from protracted conflicts that were driven by the chilling effects of exclusions. The slow pace is therefore not a consequence of the lack of political will; it is the recognition of the need to meaningfully strive to always bring the majority of the people along in the change process and to link reforms with institutional capacities, most of which are non-existent, in order to enforce the change. Consequently, we have seen that as the fiscal space has unfortunately constricted around us, so too has the pace of the reforms decelerated.

Notwithstanding, Liberians are growing in confidence that we are on a more assured path to consolidating our peace. The election, re-election and subsequent leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman to be elected President, have inspired Liberian women and girls, more than half of the Liberian population, broken their silence and steered them away from exclusion in the national decision-making processes of the country. We know that we must continue to inspire and engage them, including our youthful population. Quite simply, Liberia will never be the same. We continue to change for the better.

We still have a long way to go to be the society that we know we can be, but we are pleased with the growing recognition, including in the report that Liberia has come a long way. We urge continued partnership with the international community, the Peacebuilding Commission and the various agencies of the United Nations towards sustaining our peace. Liberia and Liberians are ready for this. We are ready to draw on the gains already made to build a society that is tolerant of our differences and respectful of the rights of all of its citizens. Once again, we are ready to present the United Nations with an important story of success — this time, with peacebuilding, just as we have with peacekeeping.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.